

Effective Utilization of the School Farm as Instructional Initiative for Developing Agricultural Interest Among Primary School Children in Nigeria

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Abstract

The study was aimed at studying the effective utilization of the school farm as instructional initiative for developing agricultural interest of primary school children in Nigeria for their proper orientation and participation in science and technology. The study was conducted in Orumba South L.G.A of Anambra State, Nigeria. To carry out the study, thirty five (35) out of the forty two (42) public primary schools in the Local Government Area of study and six teachers from each selected school were randomly sampled. This gave a total of 210 primary school teachers that constituted sample for the study. Questionnaire was the instrument used for data collection and mean was used for data analysis. Among the major findings of the study were that the school farm gives agricultural orientation to children especially those without agricultural background and increases pupils interest in and love for agriculture. It was therefore recommended that every primary school whether rural or urban should have both crop and animal farms which should be used primarily for teaching purpose. In addition, curriculum planners and implementers should take cognizance of the school farm as a critical instructional requirement for affective prosecution of the Primary Agricultural Programme. Finally, teachers of agriculture should lead the way in developing pupil's interest in agriculture by being proud of their subject and by owning and managing their own farms.

1. Introduction

Children participation in science and technology should start at the early stages of education such as the primary and early secondary school levels. The aim is to harness the natural curiosity that marks early childhood and initiate them early in life into the current trend of science and technology age so as to be useful members of the society. Oladoye (1994) in conformity stressed that children in primary schools need to be encouraged and assisted by their teacher so as to develop curiosity about nature and interest toward science. Primary school is the bedrock of any educational system and any shaky foundation built at that level affects the entire system. The impact of primary education in the lives of our youth is emphasized in the Nigeria National Policy on Education (2004) edition as the aims of primary education. These include to:

- Inculcate permanent literacy and numeracy and ability to communicate effectively;

- Lay a solid basis for scientific and reflective thinking;
- Give citizenship education as a basis for effective participation in, and contribution to the life of the society;
- Mould the character and develop sound attitude and moral in the child;
- Develop in the child ability to adapt to the child's changing environment;
- Give the child opportunities for developing manipulative skill that will enable the child function effectively in the society within the limits of the child's capacity and
- Provide the child with basic tools for further educational advancement, including preparation for trades and craft in the locality.

To achieve the stated objectives, it was emphasized also in the policy document that methods of teaching in the primary school should include practical, exploratory and experimental methods. Agriculture as a practical subject needs to be effectively taught for greater impact to be made on the learners. Okorie (1975) agreeing with this view affirmed that there is an urgent need for a sound agricultural education programme that will incorporate practical skill, right attitudes, useful knowledge and understanding based on modern agro-technology for our youths and vigorously pursued in their course programmes. Two most effective teaching-learning environments for inculcation of practical knowledge of agriculture to students are the school farm (both crop and animal farms) and the agricultural science laboratory. Emphasis on this paper is on the effective utilization of the school farm in developing the agricultural interest of our young school children. Food and Agricultural Organization (F.A.O) (2004), stressing the importance of school garden in children learning emphasized the following objectives of school garden:

1. Increasing the relevance and quality of education for rural and urban children through active learning and introduction of agriculture and nutrition knowledge and skills including life skills into the curriculum.
2. Providing school children with practical experience in food production and natural resource management, which serve as a source of innovation they can take home to their families and apply in their own house hold gardens and farms.
3. Improving school children's nutrition by supplementing school feeding programmes with variety of fresh micro nutrients and protein rich products and increasing children's knowledge of nutrition to the benefit of the whole family.

F.A.O (2004) also added that, to realise the potentials of school gardens, there should be a carefully designed, comprehensive national programmes and guidelines, which have ample room for local adaptation and full engagement of local communities.

The school farm is lacking in most urban schools and even in the rural schools. Where they exist, farming operations are not taken seriously as a means of developing both practical knowledge and initial agricultural experience in pupils but rather as a means of helping teachers raise their crops and most of the lands mapped out for such farms and not suitable for farming. Keeping of farm animals in those schools is far-fetched. Thus burdened, the researcher aims at throwing more light into the effective utilization of the school farm in developing the agricultural interest of our young school children as a means of ushering them into science and technology starting from their formative stages in life.

2. Purpose of the Study

The aim of the study is to determine the effective utilization of school farms as instructional initiative for developing agricultural interest among primary school children. The specific objectives are to:

1. Determine the level of availability and utilization of school farm in the area studied.

2. Identify the roles played by school farm in development of children's interest in Agriculture.
3. Determine the techniques required for effective management of school farm as an instructional initiative or strategy.

3. Area of the Study

The study was carried out in Orumba South L.G.A Anambra State.

4. Significance of the Study

The findings of the study will be of immense help to elementary science teachers and other agricultural science teachers as it will once more remind them of the importance of making proper use of the school farm in teaching their students. It will also help curriculum planners to re-emphasize the necessity of agriculture and the school farm in the school programme.

5. Population of the Study

The population of the study comprised all the teachers in the forty two (42) public primary schools in the local government area.

6. Sample and Sampling Technique

The sample was made up of thirty five (35) schools randomly selected out of the population. A total of six (6) teachers from each school were selected using simple random technique. This gave a total of two hundred and ten (210) respondents interviewed for the study.

7. Research Questions

The study provides an answer to these questions:

- (a) What is the level of availability of and utilization of school farms in the area studied?
- (b) What roles do the school farm play in developing students' agricultural interest?
- (c) What techniques are required for effective management of the school farm as an instructional initiative or strategy?

8. Instrument for Data Collection and Analysis

Questionnaire was the instrument used for data collection. It was constructed using the Likert scale. It comprises of three sections which contain the research questions formulated to guide the study.

Mean score was used in analyzing the data. Thus any data item that scored 3.0 and above was regarded as "Agree" while any data below it was regarded as disagree".

Result: The results of the study are as presented as the tables below.

Research Question 1: What is the level of availability and utilization of school farm in the area studied?

Table: Means rating on the level of availability and utilization of school farm in schools.

		\bar{X}	Remark
1.	Available	4.5	Strongly Agree
2.	Not available at all	1.5	Disagree
3.	Available but not enough	1.4	Disagree
4.	Available and enough	3.5	Agree
5.	Available but not in use	1.8	Disagree
6.	Available and in use	3.2	Agreed
7.	We have mainly crop farm	4.25	Strongly Agree
8.	We have only animal farm	0.05	Strongly Disagree
9.	We have both crop and animal farm	1.3	Disagree

Table 1 shows that 4 out of the 9 items on level of availability and utilization of school farm in schools attracted positive responses while others did not.

Research Question 2: Role of the school farm in the development of pupils' interest in agriculture.

Table 2: Mean ratings on the roles of school farm in the development of pupils' agricultural interest.

		\bar{X}	Remark
1.	It offers farming experience to students especially those without farming background	4.13	Strongly Agree
2.	It helps to develop students interest in and love for agriculture	3.26	Agree
3.	It offers opportunity for the demonstration of class work	4.2	Strongly
4.	It enhances understanding and retention of facts	3.7	Agree
5.	It helps to develop the spirit of team work in students	3.5	Strongly Agree
6.	It acts as instrument for trial of new farming techniques	3.24	Agree

Table 2 shows that all the 6 points listed as the roles of the school farm in developing pupils' agricultural interest were agreed with by the respondents having mean response range 0 3.24 to 4.13.

Research Question 3: What techniques are require for effective management of the school farm as an instructional initiative or strategy

Table 3: Mean responses on the techniques for effective management of the school farm as an instructional initiative/strategy.

		\bar{X}	Remark
1.	The school farm should not be used as a punishment ground for offenders	3.88	Strongly Agree
2.	Working in the school farm should be in morning or evening time and not under the sun	3.28	Agree
3.	Emphasis on farm should be on students' learning and not for personal motives	3.42	Agree
4.	Adequate records should be kept for the farm	1.95	Disagree

5.	Agric teachers should teach by example through the demonstration of class work for students in the farm.	3.28	Agree
6.	Agricultural science teachers should be proud of their subject by establishing their own farms.	3.6	Strongly Agree

Table 3 summarizes the data on the management techniques for better use of the school farm in students' learning, 5 questionnaire items out of 6 with mean response range of 3.28 to 3.88 were accepted by the respondents while 1 with mean of 1.95 was not accepted.

9. Major Findings

The findings reveal among other things that;

- most schools in the area studied have school farms;
- the farms are mostly crop farms;
- the school farm offers farming experience to pupils especially those without agricultural background;
- it helps to develop students' interest and love for agriculture;
- it enhances better understanding and retention of facts;
- in other not to discourage students' interest in agriculture, the school farm should not be used as a punishment ground for offenders;
- agricultural science teachers should show pride in their subject by having and managing their own farms.

10. Discussion of Findings

Findings on level of availability of farms in schools which shows that the schools studied possess land possibly because they are rural schools agrees with the findings of Orikpe (2002) who reported from his research in Awka South L.G.A that there was adequate land for practical agriculture. This simply indicates that there is neglect for animal farming in schools. However, just as he emphasized that farms were for crops, the schools studied possess more of crop farms only few had animal farms.

In addition, finding on the roles of the school farm which indicate that the school farm provides an agricultural experience for pupils especially those without agricultural background as well as encourage pupils love and interest in agriculture harmonizes with Douglas (1973) who posits that children's various experiences are got from their initial environment and Ngadiukwu (2000) who suggested the use of principle of *"Catch them young"* in teaching and learning of agriculture in the primary schools.

The findings also agree with F.A.O (2004) report which indicates that school garden provides school children with practical experience in food production and natural resource management, which serve as a source of innovation they can take home to their families and apply in their own house-hold gardens and farms.

Finally, findings on the management techniques that will optimize the use of the school farm in pupils learning are more of strategies that should be adopted for better students learning through their experience in the farms.

11. Conclusion

The researcher posits that if the management techniques advocated together with the recommendations proffered are seriously considered by those concerned with agriculture, our

school children will be initiated early in life into loving and participating in agriculture in particular and in science and technology in general. This will launch them into self reliance later in life.

12. Recommendations

The writer makes the following recommendations as a way forward:

1. Primary school authorities are encouraged to have both crop and animal farms in their schools whether rural or urban school and it should be primarily for the teaching of students.
2. The importance of school farm (both crop and animals) should be well emphasized in the school curriculum by curriculum planners. The facilities for effective running of the farms should be provided by the government.
3. Agricultural fair day should be organized for students at the end of each farming season or any time the teacher deems fit and feast should be incorporated into the fair. Some of the food materials for such feast should be harvested from the school farm. This gives the student a sense of pride and accomplishment.
4. Agricultural science teachers should lead the way in stimulating pupils' interest in agriculture by showing pride in their subject and by owning and managing their own farms.

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